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REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Letter dated 3 April 1996 from the Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the report of the Interregional Conference and Workshop on Public Administration and Social Development held at Stockholm from 16 to 20 October 1995 (see annex).*

The Conference and Workshop was organized by the Department for Development Support and Management Services of the United Nations Secretariat, in cooperation with the Swedish International Services. It was supported by the Government of Sweden as a contribution to the activities relating to the work of the General Assembly at its resumed session on public administration and development.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 12.

(Signed) Peter OSVALD
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Sweden to the United Nations

* The annex is being circulated in the language of submission only.

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ANNEX

Report of the Interregional Conference and Workshop on Public Administration and Social Development held at Stockholm from 16 to 20 October 1995

INTRODUCTION

The Interregional Conference and Workshop on Public Administration and Social Development was held in Stockholm, Sweden, 16-20 October 1995. The Meeting was hosted by the United Nations and the Government of Sweden and co-organized by the Department for Development Support and Management Services of the United Nations (UN/DDSMS), and Swedish International Services (Swedserv AB) with support of several participating Swedish public sector organizations.

The two-day Conference on 16-17 October 1995 was open to the international community. The Conference was followed by a three-day Workshop for participants from developing countries and transitional economies to permit further sharing of ideas and country experiences.

THE STOCKHOLM MEETING AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE SOCIAL SUMMIT

Over one hundred participants from governments, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations around the world gathered in Stockholm to accept a charge and a challenge. The charge came in the form of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. In that document, 117 Heads of State and Government, assembled at the World Summit for Social Development, committed their respective nations to:

> a political, economic, ethical and spiritual vision for social development that is based on human dignity, human rights, equality, respect, peace, democracy, mutual responsibility and cooperation, and full respect for the various religious and ethical views and cultural backgrounds of people. Accordingly, we will give the highest priority in national, regional and international policies and actions to the promotion of social progress, justice and the betterment of the human condition, based on full participation by all.[1]

These Heads of State and Government added that the responsibility for the attainment of these lofty purposes rested in the first instance with individual states but recognized as well "that these goals cannot be achieved by States alone. The international community, the United Nations, the multilateral financial institutions, all regional organizations and local authorities, and all actors of civil society need to positively contribute their own share of efforts and resources in order to reduce inequalities among people and narrow the gap between developed and developing countries in a global effort to reduce social tensions, and to create greater social and economic stability and security."[2]

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In addition to this broad charge, there is an even more specific challenge given by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 49/136 of 19 December 1994. The resolution recognized the important role that Governments and public administration can play in addressing new responsibilities arising from the pursuit of sustained economic growth and sustainable development. Among the critical areas of development highlighted for review is the role of public administration in promoting social development, and combatting socio-economic disparities and poverty.

In that context, during 1995, it was agreed to undertake a number of activities designed to enhance capacities in individual States and international organizations to more effectively implement and operate key development policies and programmes around the world. To that end, the United Nations convened a Meeting of Experts on the United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance from 31 July to 11 August 1995. One of the principal objectives of that meeting was to submit recommendations to the General Assembly for consideration on the agenda of its Resumed Fiftieth Session on Public Administration and Development to take place from 15 to 19 April 1996 in New York.[3] That session will take as its principal subject capacity building in public administration, inter alia, for social and sustainable development.

The United Nations together with the Swedish Government invited to Stockholm a wide range of experts from around the world to take the next step in the critical discussion of how to address the often discussed implementation gap between policy design and actual outcomes. The task is to find ways to make social development a reality in the day-to-day lives of people around the world. The participants worked in plenary sessions and workshops to find common ground from which to launch a renewed effort to enhance public administration for social development.

The remainder of this report presents a summary of their activities as well as their findings and recommendations.

PRESENTATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS

During the first two days of Conference, speakers from a wide range of international organizations, institutes of public administration, government officials and representatives of the host country presented both candid assessments of a wide range of problems facing social development programme designers and administrators and examples of state of the art solutions and programme successes. While recognizing that the many serious public administration problems in social development do not have ready solutions, the speakers' comments, nevertheless, sought to evaluate those problems realistically. These presentations also

prepared the way for the Working Group sessions that followed in the remaining days of the meeting.

Mr. Guido Bertucci, Director, Division for Public Administration and Development Management, presented opening remarks on behalf of the United Nations Department for Development Support and Management Services and challenged the participants to explore new possibilities for solving critical social development issues. Mr. Jan Nygren, Minister, Prime Minister's Office, Sweden set the tone for the discussions as he welcomed participants to a continuous dialogue to approach the future of public administration for social development. As Minister for Public Management in the Prime Minister's Office, Mr. Nygren explained the current major effort, through a Commission on Public Administration, to make the ambitious changes needed to prepare public administration to meet the challenges of the future. The meeting also received warm greetings from the Mayor of Stockholm, Mr. Mats Hulth and the Under-Secretary of State of Sweden, Mr. Mats Carlsson, who asserted that we need organization for civil society. He noted that sound policies were necessary but that our situation required effective public institutions to carry out those policies.

The speakers who addressed social policy issues made it clear that it was inappropriate to have social policies and finance placed in opposition to one another. Indeed, it was important to determine how we can connect and interact between social policies and economic policies. Emphasis was laid on thorough examination of mutual implications of economic and social policies at the policy formulation stage and developing appropriate mechanisms, processes and capacities to deal with those implications in the final adoption of policies and their implementation. More specifically, public management reform cannot be related solely or even primarily to cost-cutting, although it was clearly recognized that social development must be accomplished under ever more complex fiscal conditions.

A number of the experts who addressed the Conference also stressed the importance of local governments in the consideration of social programme delivery. In fact, the role of subnational institutions was deemed all the more critical in light of the continuing international trend towards decentralization, and because local government is the primary point of contact between governments and the citizens they serve. The problem is to keep attention firmly fixed on the people for whom social development policies were designed while maintaining a functioning and indeed vital network of communications and coordination with all other levels of government as well as with international institutions. It was noted that successful networking could take place within existing institutional and legal structures provided that there

existed a clear definition of long term goals and principles and quantified targets in the short term.

Enhanced organization was judged to be all the more essential in situations in which the management tasks are complex and the political, economic, and social contexts were most challenging. Thus it was important to examine critically the nature and process of decentralization as it is employed in policy implementation and programme administration. If organizations are to take public administration from the capital cities to the village streets and farmers' fields in the developing world, stakeholders must be involved, capacity building must be provided for, and there must be attention to what happens at the intermediate levels of government policy. Indeed, developed countries around the world must reexamine their service delivery systems as well, to ensure that they also meet these organizational challenges. These efforts at restructuring of policy and reorganization of delivery systems cannot achieve the results for which they were undertaken unless there is careful attention to the redesign and enhancement of civil service systems.

It was the relationship between the people and the techniques of public management to which Conference participants turned in the session on management issues. It seems clear that a positive role of government is emerging, based on active pursuit of the public interest and forward looking efforts to achieve the goals of the Copenhagen Summit. That will require attention to the mechanisms of capitalization of public enterprise and management strategies that are alert to problems of undercapitalization and designed to respond to them. It requires as well a recognition that governments will be engaged in the use of both direct service delivery operations and the use of market-based tools such as contracts, incentives, and fee based systems. The hiring, training, and supervision of the kinds of people who will be needed to administer these policy instruments demands attention to skills such as negotiation and contract management. There will increasingly be a mix of policy implements that can be employed to address a particular problem, and administrators must be prepared and skilled in a range of those instruments.

It was also clear from the discussion on management issues that there are many management techniques, from Management by Results to Total Quality Management to Total Commitment Management and from reengineering to delayering, that must be explored as possible routes to enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. At the same time, even as public managers experiment with these techniques, they must carefully study them in order to better understand how they may affect ministries and their personnel over the long term.

It is equally clear that new policies, new organizational approaches, and new management techniques call for a reconsideration of the mechanisms of accountability used in public administration for social development. Thus, there is need for more attention to be paid to appropriate mechanisms for the introduction of greater transparency, and more effective control and accountability in the management of social development programmes, particularly in developing countries.

Several speakers offered lessons from a range of social development programmes around the world as to how financing has been provided and used in creative ways. Nevertheless, there were cautions about the possible externalities that can flow from such devices as user fees in health care delivery or education, where early experiments suggest possible barriers to service access in local communities. Achievement of meaningful social development calls for effective partnership between the government, civil society and community organisations, and thus need not be equated exclusively with public spending. This involves not only optimum use and efficient management of existing resources contributed by government, but also mobilization of domestic resources by the formal sector, citizens and community initiatives, as well as contributions by bilateral and multilateral organizations and innovative financing modalities.

A recurring theme in the discussions on finance and implementation was the importance of transparency and accountability. It was made clear that participation should begin even at the stage of policy design, well before implementation and future evaluation are considered. In fact, it is important to have the involvement of stakeholders, particularly the intended beneficiaries, as the policy design process moves to consideration of the appropriate techniques of implementation and evaluation. Those techniques of evaluation must not only be technically capable of ensuring that causal linkages are clearly understood, but they must also be culturally sensitive in order to make certain that the data and analysis resulting from evaluation make sense in the local context.

RESULTS OF THE WORKING GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS

While the Conference speakers contributed a great deal of knowledge and experience to the discussions, the government officials and nongovernmental experts similarly had a great deal of experience and lessons to share and many important questions to explore. Thus, during the subsequent three days, participants were assembled in five Working Groups. The Working Groups began their discussions by exchanging information, based on country

papers which they had prepared, with regard to commonalities and unique features of their administrative systems for social development. Then they proceeded to address a set of common questions at the core of public administration for social development. These questions relate to policy making and coordination, institutional structures, decentralization, management style, financing social development, accountability, the implementation challenge, and cooperation with international agencies. The following findings and recommendations resulted from the discussion of these questions.

Facing the Difficult Question - Policy Making and Coordination

> What organizational mechanisms should be introduced to support the policy making process, especially bearing in mind the need for integrated approaches to economic and social development?

The effective formulation of social policy demands commitment at the highest level of government. Each country should adopt a long term vision of its social problems and goals. Such a picture, however, would be incomplete if it failed to address economic conditions and other contextual factors that can affect social development efforts. The objective of this effort is to develop a more coherent pattern of social policies and to enhance coordination among those policies through advanced planning. Improved coordination is also necessary between social policies and other national policies, especially those in the economic arena. It is also critical that these forecasting and goal setting activities contemplate both national and local objectives and rural and urban needs in order to facilitate decentralized administration. Such coordination is essential to enhance efficiency in the delivery of social programmes and services. In fact, decentralization is a policy mechanism in itself, the benefits of which should be fully exploited. The attempt to provide for better long term forecasting also makes possible a combination of sectoral perspectives and a more integrative sense of policy design.

It is essential that top down approaches to policy development be avoided and that efforts are made to build consensus by involving all stakeholders in the process. That effort at inclusion must reach those in rural communities as well as those in the urban areas. The involvement of all of these participants requires time and effort at all stages of the policy making and coordination process, but it will enhance cooperation at the implementation stage. Of course, political leaders must maintain effective contact with relevant groups as a policy moves through the formulation, adoption and implementation stages of the process. Government likewise has an important role to monitor the entire process. Efforts to maintain appropriate

communication will render the task of coordination with stakeholders simpler and more successful.

Establishment of a coordinating body placed at the highest level should be considered. It is also useful to consider the creation of national think tanks consisting of academics, experts and stakeholders at all levels who can provide relevant data and information, speculate about the long term and bring to the process new and different perspectives.

The entire policy process will benefit from capacity building efforts which should be undertaken at all levels of government, but particularly at the local level which is the point of contact between citizens and social services. Training in evaluation and planning techniques will benefit not only officials but also the citizens they serve.

Policy is not made on a constant or stable foundation. Crises or the existence of periods of intensive transition from one stage of development to another will dramatically affect all phases of the policy process. Where an extended transition period can be anticipated, the process should be shaped accordingly. Specifically, more contingencies will be needed in the contemplation of a particular type of policy, where significant shifts in conditions are predictable.

Finally, it is particularly important that policy development be based upon behavioral experience in the cultural setting in which the effort is undertaken. Policies based upon sophisticated incentive systems may operate in one way in a developed western economy but may have very different effects if implemented in a significantly different cultural setting without a realistic sense of the impact on local norms. It is thus particularly important to make use of impact analyses of policy efforts to inform future policy development.

Institutional Structures

> How should the institutional structures of the social sector through which public administrators work to implement policy be redesigned to meet the needs of the people they are intended to serve, recognizing the obligation to reach the sectors of extreme poverty?

Capacity building at all levels is a prerequisite for any institutional structure to function including the capacity to understand global issues and concerns and to formulate trade off and impact analysis. Raising the consciousness and participation of citizens has worked as an effective mechanism to provide a base support to the formal institutions.

The capabilities of central and local governments to coordinate and implement policies should be enhanced, to ensure sustainability and flexibility with provisions for a system of client feedback. Institutions should be able to provide service of the quality that citizens deserve and at a price affordable to taxpayers. As such these institutions should provide to the clients programmes of choice through competition. NGOs and other members of civil society could be mobilized as service providers or monitors of service implementation.

Institutions must ensure capacity to address the needs of those in extreme poverty, assess targets, and address causes as well as effects. They must be structured in such a way that they focus on the job to be done and have all the systems and techniques that enhance effective service delivery with provisions for participation, consultation and networking among the affected sectors with a streamlined centre of operation.

Decentralization and the Coordination Question

> In light of your understanding of the overall institutional design and the role played by decentralization in it, how can we obtain the benefits of decentralization and the creativity of local governments in the social field while avoiding what has been called the coordination crisis, realizing that the coordination crisis involves the need to relate local government to national organizations as well as relationships among national institutions?

Conference participants felt that decentralization was one of the most important forces in modern public administration, and particularly with respect to administration for social development. It has impact not only on individual implementation efforts, but also on the policy process as a whole. When done properly and carefully, decentralization efforts serve to empower and motivate people in government at all levels and in the community.

To be done properly, decentralization must take into account the particular context, which includes administrative dimensions and territorial or geographic factors. An awareness of cultural factors is absolutely essential. The essence of real decentralization is that at the same time it must be participative in character and facilitate involvement over the long term by all stakeholders.

There was consensus among Conference participants that effective and efficient central government is an essential precondition for successful decentralization. Effective devices for coordination must also be constructed at the intermediate levels. Indeed, it is necessary to have a clear coordinating

structure in place before decentralization efforts are launched. Once initiated, the decentralization effort must be carefully defined and controlled. This means, among other things, that it must carry to the local level both responsibility for decision and action and also the resources necessary to support those efforts.

Assessment of administrative functions prior to decentralization is needed in order to identify those that work effectively in a centralized mode, and those that would be more effective if decentralized. For example, policy formulation, coordination, and co-financing work more effectively if centralized, while budgeting, personnel decisions, operations, and delivery of service tend to work more effectively when decentralized.

Capacity building is required in order for this process to work well. This is needed by all participants in the process, but the local level is the most important locus of activity and therefore requires the most intensive efforts to build the institutions and processes required and has the greatest need for training. That effort should yield innovation, adaptability, and development of new strategies and programmes.

Real decentralization must go hand in hand with carefully designed mechanisms of accountability for administrators at all levels. It is not enough for those in the community to have had an opportunity to voice concerns. They must have a sense that their actions are more than mere opportunities to vent frustration.

It should be obvious from these requirements that decentralization is an expensive process in the short term but it should be viewed as a long term investment. In weighing those costs, the costs of not acting should also be considered.

The Matter of Management Style

> Which managerial styles, both internal and with respect to direct client services, are most appropriate for social development programmes (e.g. poverty, health care, education, social security)?

It is clear that administration for social development must be flexible and adaptable. Management procedures should be simplified and be made adaptable to the changing demands and conditions of local managers, and respond to a code of conduct. They must be performance oriented and responsive to feedback from clients and other stakeholders in social development.

Public sector employees recruitment, promotion, training and retraining systems, as well as their performance incentives, must be

designed in country and condition specific ways. The development and support of local management is essential.

Internally, management must be participative and flexible, a process in which all members of the organization provide inputs. Multi-disciplinary team building is essential if that participative process is to flourish and enhance implementation of all programmes.

Temporary rotation of the staff to share experiences could be implemented in some cases. That effort could be particularly useful, for example, in interchanging personnel in economic and social fields, in order to encourage integrated economic and social approaches.

If the management process is to be results driven, it is important to identify objectives and performance indicators. Consideration should be given to the introduction of management by objectives. Measures of performance should not be based upon production or quantity alone, but should also consider effectiveness and an awareness of value for money. When introducing performance evaluation, it is important to examine the impact of programmes on different target groups, e.g. women, who are often a major target of social development programmes.

Since decentralization is a long term goal, it must be target-specific. For that purpose interactive, systematic participation of the target groups in the management structure is critical. Consequently, proper administrative mechanisms for decentralization, including adequate information systems and technical skills and competence, should be developed.

The customer should be the focus of social programmes and there must be feedback and participatory mechanisms at customer's level. Of course, participative and feedback devices must always be culturally sensitive.

There is also a requirement for dialogue among different stakeholders, including the field personnel who actually deliver the services and for incorporating the participation of civil society (NGOs, trade unions, etc.) in the management of social programmes.

Across-the-board management training and orientation, including a commitment to learn, should be incorporated. In addition, specific training programmes for women and families can be designed to help implement the overall strategy.

Contemporary management skills require enhanced information and methodologies for managing and evaluating information. Information on the services available should be disseminated widely. For example, a directory of services can be prepared to

inform people of when, where and how they can obtain services and also of their rights. Effective media communications should also be encouraged in the dissemination process.

Financing Social Development

> How can public managers effectively reconceptualize the financial operations of social agencies, both in terms of the complexity of the revenue picture and more creative expenditure mechanisms?

The problems of finance mirror the complexity of all other elements of public administration for social development. They concern not only issues such as the amount and forms of financial resources that should be available within developing nations, but they also involve more sophisticated questions of redeployment of various kinds of financing resources.

The participants recommended that countries should allocate at least 5 per cent of their GDP to social programmes, and allocate resources to capacity building for social programmes.

Cost effectiveness should underlie policy for all social development programmes. Prestige projects should be avoided at all costs. Both needs and expenditures should be prioritized.

Dependency on external assistance should be avoided. The economy should generate the necessary resources to be applied to social development, thereby avoiding borrowing, which creates dependency. The key objective to be attained, as in all other areas, is sustainability.

Financial resources should be allocated to productive activities to raise funds for social projects such as investment in agriculture, industry, micro enterprises, etc. Proceeds from privatization of public enterprises should be channelled to social development projects.

User fees should be considered for services rendered, but attention should be given to the need to exempt from payment those who are most in need of social services yet unable to pay for them. Indeed, special incentives should be provided for those most in need of assistance to take advantage of available assistance programmes. Consideration should also be given to the use of non financial payments for social services.

Cost reduction must be achieved wherever possible, particularly where there are possible redundancies in organizations or services which should be streamlined. Governments and their taxpayers cannot be expected to provide more assistance if they are not convinced that existing resources

are being used as efficiently and effectively as possible. There must be a strict and efficient financial management system to ensure proper usage of funds. Capacity building efforts should be specifically targeted to financial administration.

Sources of funding should include fairly assessed and effectively collected taxes at both the national and sub-national levels. Loans are appropriate sources of funding but they should be considered short term funding only, except for capital expenditures on buildings or equipment. If loans are undertaken, it should be very clear how those loans will be repaid in a reasonable period. More attention should be paid to development of innovative sources of financing.

Tax incentives should be encouraged as a form of generating revenue, although they must be used carefully to avoid unfortunate competition among jurisdictions to attract businesses, leaving some taxpayers carrying a disproportionately heavy burden of taxation. Another form of investment is to enhance programme and service support in rural areas, with the aim of reducing internal migration to cities and receiving reasonable returns from agricultural production that could be reinvested in social development programmes.

Reducing excessive expenditure on military armaments should be encouraged. Even a modest percentage shift in military expenditures towards social development could produce substantial revenues which can be utilized to increase the impact of social programmes. Other forms of underused or unused capacity should be recommitted to more productive investments. In particular, investments are needed in research. They will be required for the foreseeable future in local government as well. These are long term investments that will pay various types of dividends. In evaluating both revenue generating activities and expenditures, a strong emphasis should be placed on those efforts that are likely to enhance social equity.

The Accountability Question: The Heart of It All

> How can mechanisms of transparency, control, and accountability be introduced into the management of social programmes?

Based on a review of country papers and from the deliberations of the Working Group sessions, it was clear that there was an urgent need for mechanisms to ensure transparency, accountability, and control. It is important to introduce those mechanisms into the management of social development programmes at all levels. A number of specific areas of emphasis were identified.

At the core of the discussion of accountability were repeated calls for participation at every stage of social policy development and administration, and at all levels of government. The willingness to participate which comes with a sense of efficacy and confidence in the process is particularly essential in a system in which management of results measured by well defined performance standards is to be a key to social development administration.

Implicit in the participation emphasis is a call for continuous feedback and various types of control. Beyond general mechanisms of accountability, however, the participants also called for increased use of audits, both financial and performance, with specific requirements for timely responses to audit identified deficiencies. Support for capacity development in this area is important, but participants recommended that, in the absence of expanded ability to ensure timely and regular audits within government, other independent auditors should be brought in to maintain oversight. Where necessary, there should be no hesitation to impose sanctions.

At times, there has been a lack of attention to parliamentary roles in oversight. Participants urged not only that such oversight activities be enhanced but that the results of parliamentary inquiries and other oversight activities should be used in future decision making concerning ministries and programme.

Meeting the Implementation Challenge

> Given your answers to the preceding questions, what lessons have we learned and what guidance is given to the process of implementation of reform of social programmes based upon the administrative reform efforts of the past decade around the world?

The role of public administrators is essential to bridge the gap between the policy formulation and the implementation process. Excessive attention is given to formulation, and limited attention to the implementation phase. Clarity of guidelines and operational procedures should be the focus of the implementation process.

The country reports presented by participants in the meeting provided a wide range of guidelines for effective implementation of social development based on the precept of strengthening the public administration system. The view was that lessons could be learned on what to avoid and what to emphasize in a desired social programme. For example, exemplary rural health programmes from a developing country could be used as a model in another country, with special consideration of the necessary components for effective implementation.

Participation of relevant players in the implementation process, (such as regional and local level administrators, members of the targeted community, non-governmental organizations and civil society), and in the planning and design of specific activities, was not only desirable but necessary. The level or intensity of the participation of various players can vary from country to country depending upon the strength of the public administration system. In the case of countries where the public administration is barely at its inception because the society has been ravaged by civil strife and genocide, increased participation is unlikely in the short term. In other countries, however, attention should be paid to changing ingrained traditional, submissive and subordinate patterns based on marked socio-economic disparities. Promoting responsibility and assertion of rights among community members becomes a prerequisite to active participation in the implementation process of social development programmes.

Development of a sense of ownership among public administrators is also critical to effective implementation. However, a top-down approach was pervasive with directives mandated by high-level officials or external donor agencies, even in contradiction to sound administrative practices. Among the ways to enhance a sense of ownership is to facilitate the participation of public administrators at various levels and to strengthen the role of local government institutions. Another alternative to enhance a sense of ownership is to recruit from local expertise instead of bringing in external experts. This is particularly important when regional and local cultural difference has a bearing on implementation.

Capacity building and resource allocation, both human and financial, were considered essential to assure successful implementation. Various countries experience difficulties in the implementation stage because of inadequate training. In other cases, the mandates are there but the resources are not available to carry them out.

Another barrier to effective implementation was rigid procedures that impede making necessary changes. The need for flexible, adaptive and transparent procedures to facilitate implementation was highly emphasized (instead of the application of standardized or rigid formats and practices, at times externally imposed) in order to suit the needs of the targeted groups.

Flexible operational mechanisms become necessary to accommodate unforeseen or unintended results in the implementation process. Such flexibility would allow the required adjustment of the operational mode.

Contracting out of services was viewed as an alternative under certain conditions. First, contracting out should be done when the quality of service delivery was high, and second, it should be carried out only with qualified non-governmental organizations or private agencies. Again, this was considered an option only in cases where the public sector lacked the required capability.

Implementation was considered to have been generally reactive rather than proactive. Thus, emphasis was placed on change, based on a long-term and forward looking approach instead of remedial or backward looking reform.

Joining Hands with International Institutions

> What recommendations do you have as to the most effective means of cooperation between the United Nations and other international agencies and national efforts in improving the effectiveness of public administration at promoting social development?

International agencies should foster democratic processes in Member States and social dialogue, with a view to achieving social justice and peace.

There are a number of issues that must be addressed to make it possible for international organizations to have more effective and harmonious relationships with recipient countries. They begin with the determination of the need for assistance through the process of application and award of assistance, and include the ways in which evaluation is accomplished.

Financing of projects should be needs driven. Too often, donors lack knowledge, within an appropriate context, of local needs. Donors should be available to help. However, the process should be demand driven and not unduly influenced by the institutional requirements or priorities of the donors. Projects should be seen as belonging to the countries and not to the donors. Countries and donors should operate in a spirit of partnership.

As donors assess where and how to invest, it is important to measure the wealth of would-be recipients in social and natural resources terms rather than simply in monetary terms. One aspect of that assessment should be an understanding of just how far from the take off point for development a given country is at the point of application for assistance.

Changes in donor processes and criteria are important as well as urgent. It is critically important to simplify and standardize procedures to avoid unnecessary burdens on applicants. Indeed, it is important to redesign the forms of

international financial assistance and to use as much creativity as possible in the effort. Debt swaps and similar mechanisms for social development projects should be explored.

Other changes that would arise after assistance is awarded include greater freedom for recipients to use regional and local resources. In addition to the fact that the use of such local experts is far more cost effective, it also helps to ensure that the assistance received is conditioned by a sensitivity to local needs and relevant cultural factors.

Despite the need for respect and discretion in dealing with the recipient government, it is important for donors to monitor the use of funds to prevent abuses in the interest of ensuring that the best use is being made of scarce international support funds. When there are multiple programmes in an area, it is important to coordinate overlapping projects and avoid conflicts in what might become competing projects in the same policy field.

This balance between the need to grant proper respect to recipients and yet maintain accountability in the use of funds will be assisted by an effort on the part of international agencies to stimulate dialogue with developing countries, and to include within that dialogue national professional organizations.

Another force that will contribute to the wise use of resources is for international agencies to provide information and training on best practices to ensure that the state of the art is getting to everyone in the field as quickly as possible. However, there is always the need for care in applying lessons from one context to another. Projects and sometimes even the information acquired from them are not necessarily transferable from one country to another.

Unlike an earlier day when there was an often repeated dichotomy between international actions affecting developing nations and those involving developed states, there is no longer such a simplistic distinction. Many problems of social development are truly global issues, common to all types of countries. For example, some aspects of social development, previously related mainly to developing countries in health, education, human settlements, and resettlement of displaced persons, etc. are now global in extent applicable to large segments, for example, the inner cities of developed countries. These include such concerns as homelessness, teenage pregnancy, spread of communicable diseases, etc. Other types of social development ills are also global in their effect, such as AIDS and environmental problems. Developed nations need the cooperation and assistance of other nations as do developing states.

The key to any work on international cooperation is to aim for mechanisms that lead to sustainability in service programmes and their delivery systems. As such, there is a need to monitor the programmes of action mandated by the Rio, Geneva, Cairo, Copenhagen and Beijing World Conferences.

The monitoring role should be in the nature of a facilitating process for the exchange of experiences, capacity building, etc. Innovative and creative approaches to donor financing are required including changes in conditionalities, systems for greater use of national or regional expertise, procurement, etc. Many social development issues as described above are becoming global issues which could lead to the allocation of resources for global issues instead of specific social development related problems of developing countries.

The establishment of a debt swap or other relief system for social development may be considered along similar lines as for environmental protection and other developmental activities. Attention should be given to the imposition of international agencies criteria and parameters on recipient countries where these are in conflict with national traditional systems or culture. It was stated that grants instead of loans should be made available for social development projects. Major emphasis in all externally funded activities should be given to sustainability at all levels incorporating capacity building, and the exercise of initiative at the local level in a long-term perspective. Social science research and prevailing cultural orientation may be considered as a prerequisite to many funding and technical cooperation activities.

Financing must be viewed as a set of long term concerns, including decisions about return on investment. The evaluation of returns on investment must take into consideration social, as well as economic, dividends. This is an area in which more research is needed.

CONCLUSION

The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development has stated:

"We acknowledge that the people of the world have shown in different ways an urgent need to address profound social problems, especially poverty, unemployment and social exclusion, that affect every country. It is our task to address both their underlying and structural causes and their distressing consequences in order to reduce uncertainty and insecurity in the life of people.[4]"

The Stockholm Conference and Workshop analyzed the role that public administration should play faced with this serious concern of our time. There was an effort to move beyond reform to a new

vision, appropriate as we approach the turn of a new century. There is no more critical force than the suffering of millions for want of food, shelter, health care, and the other basic necessities of life. Moreover, the task was not merely to seek immediate solutions but also to find ways to address problems that are likely to be with us for the foreseeable future.

Among the fundamental themes which the Meeting examined were the need for public administration to support and dynamize social policies, reduce inequalities, sustain investment in basic social fields such as education, health, etc., and ensure efficient management of social policies and programmes.

Decentralization and participation were perceived by the Meeting as two important forces shaping modern public administration. The transference of social services to local governments and their strengthening can bring significant improvements. It is necessary, however, to combine this process with the active incorporation of target communities in the design of the social policies, as well as in their implementation, monitoring and evaluation. At the same time, the Meeting noted, efficient central government is a precondition for successful decentralization.

The management of social programmes increasingly should emphasize flexibility, transparency and accountability; draw upon new ways to combine the efforts of government and civil society; incorporate participatory mechanisms that are culturally sensitive; and utilize enhanced methodologies for managing and evaluating information.

International organizations should orient themselves to support the development of social programmes which lead to self sustainability within the target communities; continue to stimulate dialogue and exchange of experiences; and provide information and training on best practices in the field of social development.

Thus, discussions at the Meeting were centred around how governments working with civil society and supported by the international community can achieve sustainable social development within the present economic, social, cultural and political context.

At the core of the challenge is the need to get beyond arguments over the proper role of public administration. In one sense, that is a question that is decided on an ongoing basis by the political regimes of respective governments. Nonetheless, as these discussions have indicated, there is a driving force that seeks to address the public interest while respecting the values of democratic governance and those essential human rights reiterated in the Copenhagen Social Summit documents.

Public administration will not disappear. It will acquire new techniques and face challenges to old ones. The attitudes and best practice of its practitioners will evolve as they have evolved over the past two decades, moving in the direction of greater service. The effort is to drive the focus of social development administration downward to the local community and outward to the rural areas as well as to serve the poorest citizens in both rural and urban communities.

These will not be easy undertakings, but instead they are rigorous, financially disciplined exercises. This report details concerns about sensitivity to efficiency, effectiveness, economy, representativeness, inclusion, participation and the task of ensuring value added for citizens of the respective countries. The efforts to address the central values of social development articulated in the Copenhagen documents is as difficult as it is essential.

The Conference and Workshop represented a process of engagement, of a collegial confrontation with the most difficult challenges. Its participants expressed frustration as well as optimism, and challenged the international institutions to take new and bold initiatives, such as the call for a complete revision of the international process for providing development assistance. There was a demand to address problems in the streets and rural areas and a call for more support to the development of local and regional expertise. There was likewise a demand for a continuous dialogue between administrators and those in whose name they govern. Finally, there was a call to others to join in the challenge.

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1. Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, p. 9.

2. Ibid., p. 11

3. Report of the Twelfth Meeting of Experts on the United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance, September 26, 1995

4. Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, p.3.